Elisabeth Elliot: A woman for all seasons

By Chaplain Corey Thornton

No other woman has so impacted my life and inspired my ministry as much as Elisabeth Elliot. It seems to me that Elisabeth has lived through every possible season of life a woman could experience. She has been married three times and widowed twice, yet has lived as a single woman for half of her 85 years. She has lived with her young daughter among a savage tribe of natives, walked jungle trails, met dignitaries and celebrities, taught college, helped translate an unwritten language, and has been featured at many women's conferences. As an author she has written about her firsthand experiences with loneliness, heartbreak, and love. Her life was part of a story that shook the world in 1956 when five young missionaries risked everything to preach Christ to the Auca Indians in Ecuador.

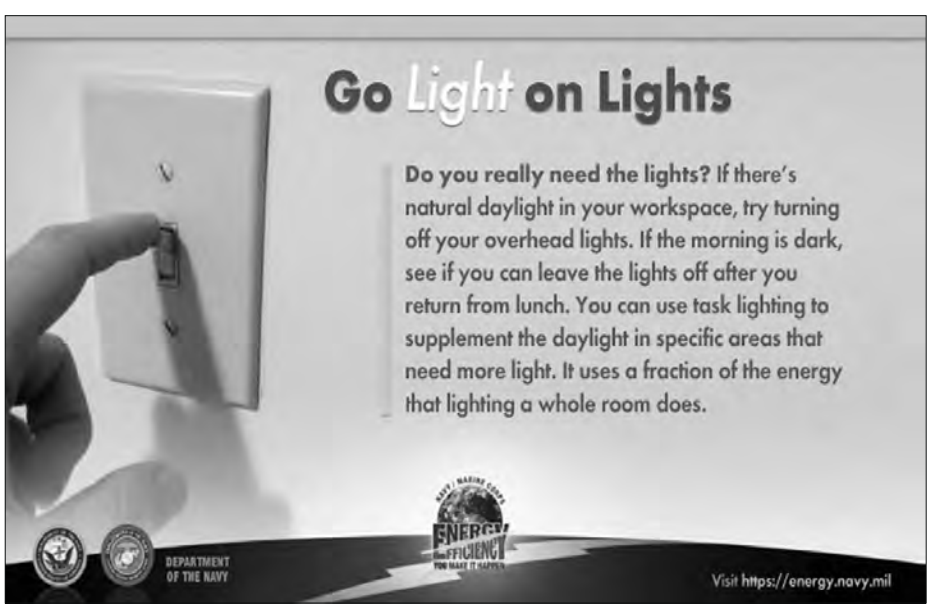
Though I have never met Elisabeth Elliot, she has made an indelible impression on me through her books, personal testimony and radio show, "Gateway to Joy". This remarkable woman went off the air at 75 years old. She was born in 1926 to missionary parents. She grew up in a loving, Christian home and knew from a young age that God wanted her to be a missionary. Elisabeth met Jim Elliot at Wheaton College in 1947. She wrote about those years in her book, Passion and Purity. She said, "I began to learn to wait. Patient waiting does not come naturally to most of us, but a great deal is said about it in the Bible. It is an important discipline for anyone who wants to learn to trust." She and Jim Elliot's story is one of triumphant love. In Passion and Purity, Elisabeth shares Jim's letters from those years they were apart. The letters are filled with eloquent messages of love and longing.

I decided to let Elisabeth tell you about her life in her own words from the About Elisabeth page of her website: "A year after I went to Ecuador, Jim Elliot, whom I had met at Wheaton, also entered tribal areas with the Quichua Indians. In 1953 we were married in the city of Quito and continued our work together. Jim had always hoped to have the opportunity to enter the territory of an unreached tribe. The Aucas were in that category—a fierce group whom no one had succeeded in meeting without being killed. After the discovery of their whereabouts, Jim and four other missionaries entered Auca territory. After a friendly contact with three of the tribe, they were speared to death. Our daughter, Valerie was 10 months old when Jim was killed. I continued working with the Quichua Indians when, through a remarkable providence, I met two Auca women who lived with me for one year. They were the key to my going in to live with the tribe that had killed the five missionaries. I remained there for two years. After having worked for two years with the Aucas, I returned to the Quichua work and remained there until 1963 when Valerie and I returned to the U.S."

Since then, Elisabeth Elliot's life has been one of writing and speaking. It also included, in 1969, a marriage to Addison Leitch, professor of theology at Gordon Conwell Seminary in Massachusetts. He died of Cancer in 1973. After his death she had two lodgers in her home. One of them married her daughter; the other one, Lars Gren, married Elisabeth."

She has written 23 books. I recommend that you read anything that she has written. One book, in particular, that I recommend is titled, Let Me Be a Woman which she wrote from her daughter upon the occasion of her marriage. In 1973, a readers' theatre production of Bridge of Blood: Jim Elliot Takes Christ to the Aucas was first performed at Tennessee Temple University. In 2003, a musical based on the story of Jim and Elisabeth Elliot, entitled, Love Above All, was staged at the Victoria Concert Hall in Singapore. This musical was staged a second time in 2007 at the University Cultural Centre, Singapore. In the 2006 film, End of the Spear, Elisabeth was portrayed by actress Beth Bailey. In "Beyond the Gates of Splendor", a documentary film released in 2002, she appears as herself. The other wives of the missionaries killed, as well as several Indians, and others, also appear. Additionally, The Papers of Elisabeth Elliot are available for use at the Billy Graham Center Archives in Wheaton, Illinois.

Whenever I listen to Elisabeth Elliot on the radio, I leave with fortified spirit. She uses her experiences as a daughter, wife, mother, widow, and missionary to bring the message of Christ to countless women and men around the world. Her teachings and courageous faith have influenced believers and seekers of Jesus Christ for half a century. She is one of the most influential Christian women of our time. I pray that her life and her works will be a blessing to you, as they have been to me, as you seek God's will for your life.



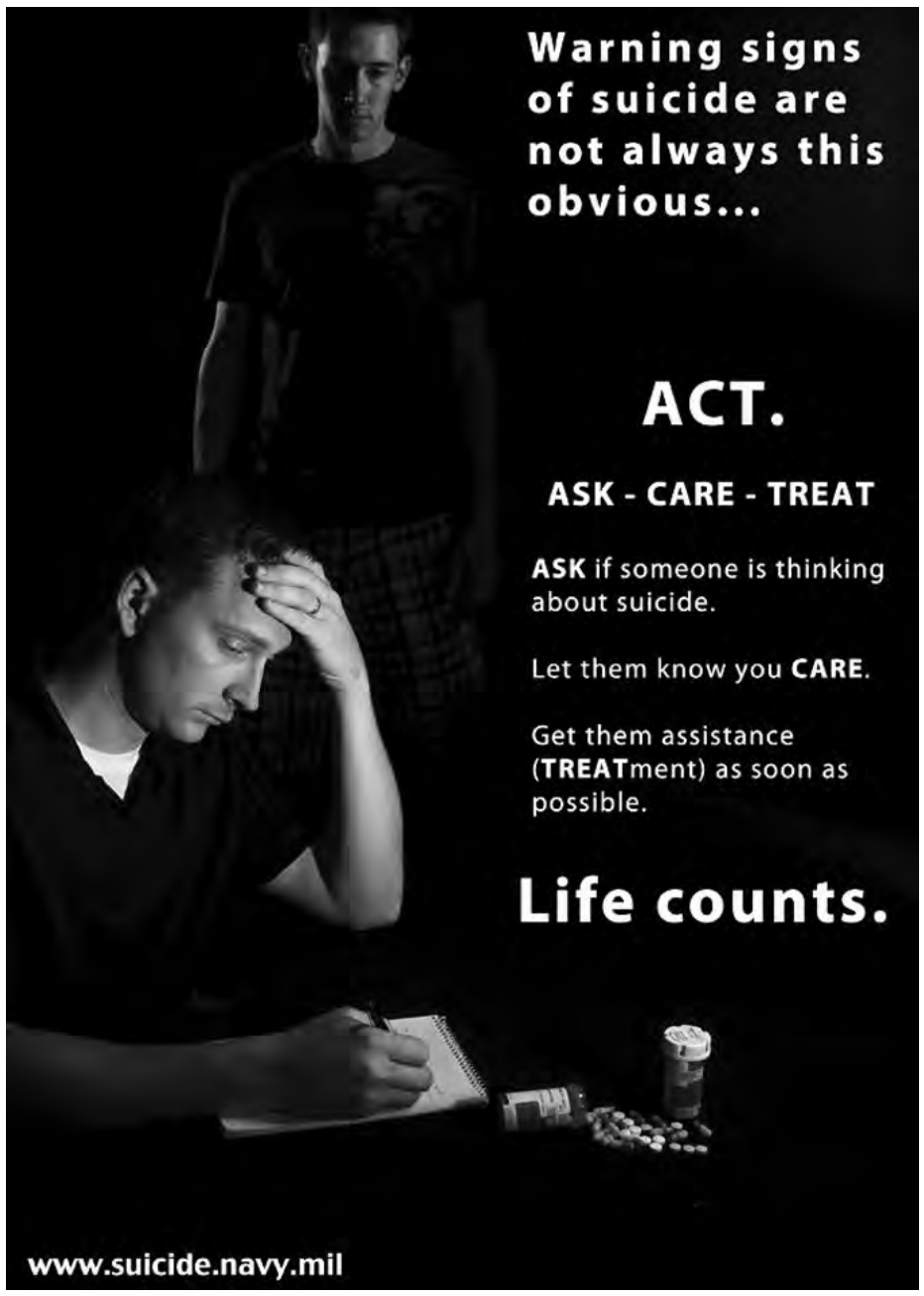
Recently at the courthouse...

From Senior Trial Counsel, RLSO Japan

The following cases were recently heard at courts-martial in Navy Region Japan:

• A General Court-Martial found an E-7 guilty of the following offenses: aggravated sexual abuse of a child; aggravated sexual contact with a child; indecent liberties with a child; aggravated sexual abuse of a child; indecent acts; disrespect toward a superior commissioned officer; insubordinate conduct toward warrant officer, noncommissioned officer, or petty officer; false official statements; and disorderly conduct. The E-7 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, confinement for 6 years, and a Dishonorable Discharge.

• A General Court-Martial found an E-3 guilty of receiving and possessing child pornography. The E-3 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, confinement for 42 months, and a Dishonorable Discharge. A pretrial agreement in the case limited confinement to 36 months.

• A General Court-Martial found an E-4 guilty of the following offenses: wrongfully consuming alcohol between the hours of 2-6 a.m.; being drunk and disorderly; indecent act; and assault consummated by a battery. The E-4 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-1, confinement for 6 months, and a Bad Conduct Discharge.

• A Special Court-Martial found an E-6 guilty of theft, dishonorable failure to maintain funds, and obstruction of justice. The E-6 received a reduction to the paygrade of E-3, forfeiture of $1320.00 for 3 months, and confinement for 3 months.